

**CRIMINAL GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURAL FACILITATION OF
TRANSNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING IN LATIN AMERICA (2006–2025):
A COMPARATIVE CRIMINOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

This study examines the structural conditions that enable the persistence and expansion of transnational drug trafficking networks in Latin America between 2006 and 2025. Moving beyond actor-specific attribution, the research adopts a systemic criminological approach to analyze how institutional fragility, regulatory gaps, and asymmetrical state capacity contribute to the operational continuity of organized crime. Using an interdisciplinary framework integrating criminology, political economy, geostrategic analysis, and open-source intelligence triangulation, the study identifies recurrent patterns of criminal governance, logistical adaptation, and calibrated violence deployment across major regional corridors. The findings support the hypothesis that trafficking networks thrive in environments marked by partial state capture, fragmented sovereignty, and uneven enforcement mechanisms. The article advances structural facilitation as a conceptual model explaining the resilience of illicit economies in complex governance contexts.

Keywords: criminal governance; transnational crime; drug trafficking; Latin America; structural facilitation; organized crime; criminology.

1. Introduction

Transnational drug trafficking in Latin America constitutes a highly adaptive and resilient system embedded within complex socio-political environments. Traditional analytical approaches have frequently centered on actor-level accountability, cartel leadership, or episodic state corruption. While useful, such perspectives remain insufficient to explain the long-term persistence and territorial reconfiguration of illicit networks across multiple jurisdictions.

This study addresses that gap by proposing a structural criminological analysis centered on criminal governance and institutional facilitation.

Research Question: What structural conditions enable the continuity and evolution of drug trafficking networks in Latin America between 2006 and 2025?

Hypothesis (H1): The persistence of transnational drug trafficking in Latin America is significantly associated with structural governance asymmetries rather than isolated actor-level variables.

2. Theoretical Framework

The analysis integrates classical and critical criminology with theories of state fragility, illicit economies, hybrid sovereignty, and geostrategic territorial control.

The concept of criminal governance is used to describe the capacity of organized crime groups to regulate territories, populations, mobility corridors, and illicit markets through coercion, informal normativity, and economic substitution.

Structural facilitation is defined as the constellation of institutional, economic, political, and regulatory conditions that indirectly enable illicit operations without requiring explicit state complicity.

This distinction separates direct collusion, permissive incapacity, fragmented enforcement, and contested territorial sovereignty.

3. Methodology

A qualitative-comparative cross-national design was implemented.

Data sources: systematic documentary analysis; triangulation of OSINT and academic literature; comparative regional case studies; criminodynamic analysis; criminogenetic assessment; forensic logic for behavioral pattern identification.

Geographic scope: The study covers 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Analytical variables: trafficking corridors; organizational typologies; territorial control mechanisms; violence deployment patterns; logistics adaptability.

Evidence scale: High = directly documented; Medium = corroborated across sources; Inferential = stable pattern-based inference.

4. Results

The analysis identifies four primary transnational corridors: Andean Corridor (Peru–Bolivia–Brazil); Caribbean Corridor (Venezuela–Dominican Republic–Puerto Rico); Mesoamerican Corridor (Colombia–Central America–Mexico); Southern Cone Corridor (Paraguay–Argentina–Brazil).

Comparative Matrix

Andean Corridor — production-logistics control — selective coercion

Caribbean Corridor — maritime route brokerage — low-visibility enforcement evasion

Mesoamerican Corridor — route sovereignty — hyper-violent signaling

Southern Cone Corridor — financial-logistics integration — corruption-assisted containment

Across these corridors, networks display logistical adaptability through multi-modal transport systems, decentralized cell-based organizational diversification, strategic violence for territorial signaling and deterrence, and rapid route substitution after enforcement disruption.

These dynamics persist across changing political administrations, supporting a structurally embedded rather than actor-dependent interpretation.

5. Discussion

The findings strongly support the structural facilitation hypothesis.

Institutional weaknesses—including regulatory blind spots, corruption vulnerabilities, fragmented law enforcement, and asymmetrical border governance—generate permissive environments for illicit economies.

Violence emerges as both an operational mechanism and a communicative instrument. It reinforces territorial dominance, disciplines local actors, and deters state intervention.

The observed criminal governance patterns validate the presence of parallel authority systems, economic regulation by criminal actors, coercive dispute resolution, and route taxation regimes.

6. Limitations

This study relies on secondary data and open-source information, which remain vulnerable to reporting bias, under-detection, and geopolitical asymmetries in data production.

Additionally, the evidence classification scale introduces interpretive constraints inherent to pattern-based inference.

Future research should integrate primary field interviews, judicial datasets, quantitative route modeling, and homicide-route correlation analytics.

7. Conclusions

Between 2006 and 2025, transnational drug trafficking in Latin America demonstrates high structural resilience.

The persistence of routes, governance patterns, and violence architectures indicates that illicit networks are sustained primarily by systemic conditions rather than isolated actors.

The proposed model of structural facilitation offers a robust analytical framework for understanding the interaction between organized crime, state asymmetry, and territorial control.

Effective disruption requires coordinated international strategies centered on institutional strengthening, regulatory coherence, logistics disruption, anti-corruption reinforcement, and cross-border intelligence integration.

Absent structural reform, organized crime will continue to outpace fragmented enforcement architectures.

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